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ST. FRANCIS

TROUBADOUR OF THE SPIRIT

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ST. FRANCIS

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A TROUBADOUR OF THE SPIRIT

BY

REGINALD R. BUCKLEY

LONDON

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17 GRAPE STREET, NEW OXFORD STREET, W.C.

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TO MY MOTHER

*Patient beneath the heavy hand of Pain
She suffers, bravely striving to be well ;
Leaving no little means untried to quell
Th' anxiety of those who seek her gain.
Though weak the body yet the soul is strong,
And all things noble in the human strain
Among her thoughts, and in her feelings throng.
Why should they suffer who have done no wrong ?
Her brow is circled with a crown of thorns,
Harvest of many sorrows of the past.
Oft that which chastens in the end adorns,
And, like St. Francis' Rose, we hope, at last,
The point of pain may soften, and the bloom
Of health give gladness where the thorns brought
gloom.*

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INTRODUCTION

THE FRANCISCAN IDEAL

WE are standing in the dawn of a new age of Faith. Behind the veils of disorder, of heresy, of controversies, and class-warfare, one hears the Song of the Angels, which was in Eden at the Beginning.

Pilate and Caiaphas are dust; Golgotha has lost its terror. Gethsemane, no more a garden whose dew was red with agony, is bright with the flowers of passionate promise.

The poem which follows is a breath of this revelation. Its faults I deplore. No poet could be worthy the Franciscan mantle ; but perhaps the brown habit fits

a busy journalist better than one whose place is at the high tables of the great. And if the Christian Faith is to hearten mankind again, let us not forget that the fishers and publicans—and at least one journalist of old—were awake to the Divine arrogance of the Son of Man; while pomp and power slept meekly beneath Caesar's yoke.

There lingers to this day an idea that Christianity is based upon a denial of life: that, indeed, the world never became light again after the thick darkness that settled upon Calvary. The life of Francis of Assisi is a complete refutation of that idea. The brown habit of the Franciscan seems to some hectic spirits a symbol of drab despair. Nor can one deny that in all ages the opposite conceptions of world-power and

puritanism have contended for mastery. Yet it has not been at the table of the Inquisition or by the fires of Smithfield that the new day of Christianity received her imprimatur. But from the rose garden St. Francis gathered and set upon his Master's brow a crown that was not of thorns. Well might he, with Cavalcanti, have sung :

Go, song of mine,
To break the hardness of the heart of man :
Say how his life began
From dust, and in that dust doth sink supine :
Yet, say, the unerring spirit of grief shall guide
His soul, being purified,
To seek its Maker at the heavenly shrine.

And the roses of Pieria, shed in grief,
become fragrant with a new meaning.

Francesco Bernardone was the son of a wealthy merchant and weaver of cloth. His mother, Fru Pica, was of Provence.

Though Francis was born in Assisi, 1182, the soul of Provençal poetry was in him. He joined his father in business, and showed a quick aptitude and a remarkable power of making money. But the troubadour blood made him a spendthrift. Like Dante, he was acquainted with the 'Chansons de Geste,' and the tales of Merlin, Tristan, and Arthur. But at this period of Courts of Love, of 'la gaya Scienza,' it was not to the Table Round or to the Grail that the young men of fashion would turn. Of these, Francis was the wealthiest, and no doubt a leader. Indeed, Francis wore a 'jongleur's' clothes, spent his money like water, gave liberally to the poor, and conducted himself like a prince. Yet he was not a libertine, and had the artist's objection to

coarse language ; though anyone further from the founder of the Franciscan Orders could not be imagined.

Francis lived in an age of strife : when Perugia was about to descend upon Assisi. He fought among the ranks of other fashionable youths ; was captured. For a year he was imprisoned, helping his fellows to bear their lot—not by prayers and good counsel, but by singing and joking. Among other things, he proclaimed the belief that a ‘ great future awaited him, and that all the world would fall down and pray to him.’

But it was not in the splendour of a Borgia soldier-Pope that the world, ‘ with raiment torn and many tears,’ bowed down. It was by the negation of all his hopes that an immortal and enduring splendour clung about his name. Wealth

became poverty ; health turned to sickness. Instead of giving largess he begged alms, and kept nothing for himself. He who had desired to ride forth as a Knight of the Table Round, winning honour in a good cause, was content to lose all his friends save one, and to live the life of a beggar.

Gradually this casual goodwill developed. We know the tale of the lepers, and how Francis made amends for his repugnance by kissing the dreadful hands which were stretched out to receive his alms. Like St. Paul, he 'became as a fool' ; and eventually we are led to the great scene where Francis and his father appeared before the bishop. There, in public, Francis restored to his father the money and clothes that he had received, and, save for a loin-cloth, stood naked in

the midst, disowning his father and dedicating his life. His brother and friends cast him off.

His first work was to build churches ; and we find him singing merry songs in return for building material. His religious life began in labour rather than in the regular study and discipline of monastic life. One might apply to the Franciscan philosophy the Nietzschean term, 'a transvaluation of all values.' Indeed, I believe that the Nietzschean is often nearer to the ideal of Christian strength than are those who have built upon the gentler sayings of Christ a tyranny of weakness. He came 'not to bring peace, but a sword,' and held up an ideal of strength and good courage. Everything that to the worldly seems desirable was cast away. His band of

disciples was won by the very actions that turned his 'friends' away from him. Yet it was a life of delight. For Francis only denied himself useless things. Almost one is tempted to ask why he gave to others the gold that he despised. The answer is that Francis never denied the use of money as a medium of exchange.

Now Francis was loyal to his Church, and went to Rome to obtain sanction from Pope Innocent III. The whole conception of the Order was Apostolic, as was the Table Round of Arthur. Two by two the friars minor were to preach; and Francis delighted to regard them not only as successors of the Apostles, going forth without staff or scrip, but also as Grail knights seeking the 'spiritual place.' He might have foreseen that one day

Dante would enter into that Third, or Lay Order—which to this day is a force in the life of the world. And the Church blessed the scheme ; no doubt wondering, as did Bishop Guido, why Francis refused to build up an endowment and possess property. But Francis knew the age, which was voluptuous and full of all manner of heresies. Rome itself harboured Satanists, who celebrated a black Mass. And it was clear that a return to absolute simplicity and poverty, made not only bearable, but delightful, by the sunlight and bird-song of a land of beauty, would exercise a deep influence upon the world. It was no dry-marrowed asceticism that moved the soul of Francis.

The keynotes of the Franciscan ideal are social work and the power of song. And the true follower of Francis will

set himself in antagonism to all luxury, breeder of envy and ennui. And he will seek the source of all joy and delight ; by no means denying life, but filling it from the well-springs of true happiness.

But, you say, the Master Himself took pleasure in pain.

For this there was a reason. To one of my readers, the call of Father Damien may come. To another, the simple faith of Francis may tend to decrease personal worry ; to slake the thirst of mere personal ambition. But the founder was in a different position. The model of the Order was Apostolic, and Francis, as the head, stood in the same relation to it as did the Founder of the Church. The very daring of such an idea compelled Francis to balance the noble arrogance of his life-work with a personal abnegation. That

this abnegation went too far was admitted by Francis upon his deathbed. Brother Ass (the body) deserves, surely, the same kindly attention that one would bestow upon beasts of burden. But Francis was a poet, to whom the very thought of ease was abhorrent. He who preached to birds, and made friends with a wolf, seemed to delight in suffering; while, by some law of contrast, he turned the blackness of pain to joy and song, as the jet coal springs to life as Brother Fire.

To each one of us, the Franciscan ideal appears a little differently. I see in it something of the Greek spirit, united with a Christianity that is symbolised by the word Easter—a thing risen from Hebraic gloom and pagan dust. But one must admit that the Benedicite—the song of praise from the burning fiery furnace—

has just that sense of unity of all things still or moving which is apparent in St. Francis' own song. And because all philosophies seem to separate men and women—and even Christianity, through divisions and dissensions, has failed so far to bring to the world a spirit of joy—one turns to Francis of Assisi with a new hope.

As for the poem, I believe that to some it may bring the sense of rest amid the toils of daily life that its writing gave to me. And I cherish the hope that somewhere lives the man who, through the power of music, may bring the Franciscan ideal to the choral societies, which in an age of strife bind the folk together. Walford Davies already has done this in part; his Song of the Sun being based upon that of St. Francis.

But more remains : this poem itself awaiting its musical life.

It will not be by disputation that the winter snows shall give place to the Christmas Birth ; but by a natural and simple faith, the fields of mankind one day shall blaze in Resurrection.

R. R. B.

September 26, 1912.

(The anniversary of St. Francis' Baptism.)

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

A Man of Sorrows, and with grief acquainted. . . .

A Child of Joy, from Sorrow risen.

Hated by His own, and nailed upon the Tree. . . .

Loved by his folk,

Loved for his Master's Name,

St. Francis of Assisi,

Brother of the poor,

Thee, in joy, we sing !

Hail, joyful son of sorrow !

In whom the Master liveth,

Thy laughter sounds thro' all the world ;

While Pleasure's doleful children
In sensual prison lie,
Their pomp and passion ended,
Their banners torn and furled.

Hail, gentle Francis, breaker of our
bondage !

Gethsemane's dark Garden is full of
flowers to-day.

The Crown of Thorns and anguish
That down the ages burned,
Upon the brow of Francis,
To Rose and Laurel turned.

For in His Name he bowed him down,
For Christ's sake suffered scorn,
That all the world with Faith should
glow
As burns the Rose of Dawn.

THE MOUNTAIN

(Francis set forth at eventide, with Brother Leo, to the mountain called Alvernia. The soldiers of Orlando guarded them, and the halt and maimed followed, fearing to lose Francis. When they came near the mountain, Francis bade them depart, save Leo.)

The mountain dread and drear,
Bids all men fear :
For doubt and care
Lay bare the soul.
There God seems far away,
And evil near. . . .

We fear no ill,
Nor is there any need of sword.
We wander far,

Yet step by step,
And hour by hour,
Nearer the Passion of our Lord.

Dark as the night,
Deep as the sea,
The soul of the world in slumber is laid.
Dark with our sin,
Deep with our sorrow,
The frown of the brooding heavens is
spread,
While unafraid,
Upward and on they tread.
The feet of the faithful are torn
By the stones of the way.

No need of sword,
Nor human aid is thine,
Alone and free
From folk or friend. . . .

Down droop the dark,
The lonely gloomy hours,
While strange and eerie powers
Wind through the tresses of the
thoughts of men.

THE HALT AND MAIMED

He is gone from among us.
The night is here.
In fear and weakness,
We wait the Hour.
His mighty meekness,
His humble power
Win wealth from heaven,
And health to leaven
The lives of men.

The darkness is growing,
The cold dew is falling.

He is gone to the Mountain
Of fasting and prayer.

SPIRITS OF THE WORLD

Roses, roses, leaves of the Vine,
Wide is our garden, O World,
Happy the hour that lives.
Sweet visions of joy and of pleasure
entwine,
Juice of the Grape and leaves of the
Vine !

Rejoice in thy beauty, O World,
Heed not the power of death !
Eat of the fruit and drink deep,
Forgetful of sin and of strife.
Roses and leaves of the Vine,
Swift flows the River of Life.

THE WORLD

To dark Alvernia's Mount my way I
wend,

Where Francis lingers long in fast and
prayer.

Follow, my children of the Vine, and
there,

With none to praise him,

None to praise and tend,

The whole earth in an awful silence
sealed,

St. Francis, brother of the poor, shall
yield.

SPIRITS OF THE WORLD

Come, in sinuous toil, O sisters!

Winding through the thoughts of men,

Tempting, luring, laughing, troub-
ling

Till hell bid us home again.

LEO

Who are ye who round us throng,
Full of a restless mirth,
Shaking the fallen leaves of song,
In the eager sadness of Earth?

THE WORLD

With the Wine of Wordly Wisdom
Make an end of grief and pain.
Francis, burning heart of song,
Make no more thy war upon me.

Thou, who hast no hate for sinners,
Sadden not the face of Sin.

LEO

Unholy World, away!

.

Rejoice in thy Faith, O Earth,
Fear not the hour of Death!

Eat of the Bread in His Name,
Drink of the Cup of His Life.
Roses and leaves of the Vine,
Bitter the waters of strife.

WORLD

Be sad no more, sons of the mystic Name.
The Man of Sorrows passed away. . . .
Joy and the sun-god came.
Be poor no more,
For Power is King to-day !
Power and Pride are thine,
For the very beasts obey.
Kings and cardinals hearken to Francis'
word.

LEO

Soul of the World, 'tis thine this talk of
sorrow.
Thine, Child of Pleasure, thine the Pain.

What canst thou gain amid thy golden
fever ?

Ours th' eternal lightness,
The beauty and the laughter.

Hither he came,
Francis of Assisi !

Hither he came,
Son of joy and gladness,
To eat the Bread of Labour,
To drink the Cup of Sorrow,
Amid the storm of sorrow,
Amid the clouds of care.

Out of the deeps alone shall God appear,
Where darkness broodeth,
His shining hosts are near !

Away, unholy World !
Until thou come,
With willing tears,
Fever and fears are thine.

WORLD

The storm-winds are gathered together
against us,
Therefore let our days be merry
Against the hour of death.
For behold, the leaf of the Vine shall be
green,
When the wood of thy Cross shall wither
away.

LEO

Lo, in the voice of the storm,
The anguish of the ages cries aloud for
ever !

.

Out of the storm, O God,
Answer the yearning of the Ocean,

As the hopeless desires of Man beat
upon the rocks of Time.

Yea, they cry joyously, as though aflame
with wine,

But their heart is as ashes, and their
souls athirst for Thee.

Thou, Who didst give Thy Son to slake
the hunger of their sin,

Give unto Francis the burden of his
prayer—

That in his soul, and through his body
burn

The pain and anguish of His bitter
passion !

Thou, Who didst set Thy Son for ever
upon the Hill of Pain,

Set Thy seal on Thy servant,

Lest the joy of his heart turn him away.

Give unto Francis the burden of his
prayer !

That in his soul, and through his body
glow
The soldier's spear, the gleaming nails !
And grant, O Lord, some thought of Thee
Be kindled with each point of pain,
And that with every pang,
Fresh Love be born !

*(Francis came down from the Mountain
endowed with the holy stigmata, and
the world wondered thereat.)*

O World, in joy created,
In sin and doubt cast down,
Like unto Him, is Francis smitten sore,
That joy and sorrow mingle in his
song,
And red shall be the roses of his
crown.

When to the Cross thou comest,
With raiment torn and many tears,
Outcast shall be thy fears,
And thou redeemed,
As by our Lord the promise came
But only in His Name,
In sorrow clad,
Shalt thou be glad.

(The time came when Francis was near to death. The heart of the World was filled with sorrow, but the soul of Francis was full of song.)

In grievous pain
His body lies.
In aching agony his eyes are closed,
Too weak to meet the sun.

WORLD

Alas! that I no pleasure find,
Who seek it day by day,
With raiment torn,
And many tears,
I come.

.

Cypress! Cypress! groves of the dead,
Sweet life is drooping. . . .
The petals are shed.
Empty the Cup, and the Singer shall go.
Ah! we are shrouded in woe! . . .

WORLD

Alas! that I no pardon win,
Who seek it day by day.
Francis is bound by pain,
As I by sin am riven. . . .
Hard have I striven!

No peace is found !
Though, to the Cross I came,
And in His Name
Laid down my Pride.

LEO

He biddeth us sing for his joy,
Songs of the beauty and worth
Of the fruit and the flowers that lie
In the hand of our sister, the Earth.

.

As evensong bids us to rest,
Bids Francis for ever on high,
Sing we the songs of delight,
Things goodly that never shall die.

.

Light of the World, whose splendour seems
The glory of the Three in One,
Bright beyond our golden dreams,

Praise unto thee, O Brother Sun !

Pure in the kindling lamp of Day,

Kind in the flooding blaze of Noon,

Thy blood-red rays the beauteous
boon

That burns our guilt and grief
away.

Till the gloom . . .

And the gloaming . . .

Know the peace of Eventide.

Flaming from Dawn to Night,

Till the stars spring to greet thee
again,

Naught is hid from thy sight,

Nor sorrow nor pain,

Till the Earth and the Heaven be
one.

Praise unto thee, O Brother !

Praise be to Thee, O Sun !

WORLD

Nay, ye should sing

Anodyne songs to soothe—

Of the sadness of pain,

The gladness we gain

Hidden from cruel light,

In the folds of eternal Night.

LEO

Nay, he bids us again—

‘ Sing gladly ! The Night is near done.’

The Kingdom is won.

O World, thy sorrow is vain.

.

The eyes of the Stars are bright
With the tears that are shed on Earth,
But our Sister, the Moon, is agleam
With lightness and mirth.

For the spheres are alight
With the laughter of those that
dream,
Clad in the armour of Faith,
Glad in their freedom from fear.

And the stars forget their tears,
As they watch the children asleep.
The angels their vigil keep :
The Sisters of Clare
Tend at the last
Him to whom Earth is past,
And Heaven come near.

SISTERS OF CLARE

Come ! O Death,
Nearer dark Sister of Dream.
Cool is thy hand on the brow.
He needeth thee now.
Blessed be thou in thy setting, O Sun !
The light of the faith shines o'er the
 Ocean of Time.
Life and Death, ye who in Christ are one,
Take our Brother,
Free from the Cross of his Pain,
Folded in Death near to the heart of
 the . . . Son.

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